



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER & PRESIDIO OF MONTEREY
INSTALLATION LEGAL OFFICE
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MONTEREY, CA 93944-3327

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

ATZP-JA

26 July 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL

SUBJECT: Tattoo Policy Guidance for Commanders

1. **PURPOSE:** To provide commanders with guidance in determining whether a soldier's tattoo complies with the Army's Tattoo Policy.

2. **REFERENCES:**

- a. Army Regulation 600-20, Army Command Policy, 13 May 2002.
- b. Army Regulation 670-1, Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia, 5 September 2003

3. **DISCUSSION:**

- a. Tattoos or brands that are visible in a Class A uniform are prohibited.
- b. Pre-existing small, inconspicuous, or inoffensive tattoos or brands on areas of the body other than the face, neck, or head (i.e. ankle or hand) are not prohibited for current soldiers if it does not detract from a soldierly appearance. New tattoos visible in a class A uniform are prohibited.
- c. The following tattoos or brands are a violation of Army policy and must be removed, regardless of their location on the body. Tattoos that are:
 - (1) racist or reflect association with extremist organizations that advocate discrimination based on race, color, gender, ethnicity, religion or national origin or advocate unlawful violence, such as "KKK", swastika, etc.;
 - (2) indecent, which is defined as grossly offensive to modesty, decency, or propriety; shock the moral sense because of their vulgar, filthy, or disgusting nature; tend to incite lustful thought; or tend reasonably to corrupt morals or incite libidinous thoughts.
 - (3) sexist, or degrades or demeans a person based on gender; or
 - (4) very large tattoos or brands, such as one covering a majority of one or more limbs, that detract from a soldierly appearance.

d. A soldier may be administratively discharged for failing to remove a tattoo that the commander finds prejudicial to good order and discipline. The commander must first properly counsel the soldier regarding the tattoo policy and tattoo removal procedures. The commander should not order the soldier to remove the tattoos.

e. If necessary, Administrative Law Division will assist the commander to determine whether the tattoos violate the policy. Provide photos of the tattoo(s) to the Administrative Law Division. Commanders are ultimately responsible for making the appropriate judgment call. In difficult cases or cases where there is a question of enforcement, DA recommends that the decision be reviewed by the Special Court-Martial Convening Authority after consultation with SJA.

f. If the commander finds the tattoo violates the policy, he should counsel the soldier in writing about the policy and provide the soldier an opportunity to seek medical advice about the process of removing tattoos and associated risks. The soldier's clinic should provide a consult to Dermatology. The Dermatology Clinic will give the soldier information regarding tattoo removal. The commander can also advise the soldier that the tattoo can be modified, at the soldier's expense, to conceal its offensive nature. For example, clothing could be added to an indecent tattoo.

g. If the soldier refuses to remove or modify the offending tattoo, the commander should counsel the soldier in writing that he is not in compliance with the Army policy. The written counseling form will state the soldier understands that a decision not to have the tattoos removed could result in adverse administrative action, to include discharge from the Army. If the soldier elects not to pursue removal/modification of the tattoo, you may proceed with a separation action.

4. POC is CPT Young J. Park at (831)242-6402.